



Design Review Board (DRB) Staff Report
Prepared for the November 3, 2021 DRB Meeting

New Construction

Case # 21-4: Central Yards
2101 Central Ave
Memphis, TN 38104

Applicant: Clayton Kemker
RE&D Investments, LLC
232 Southmill Drive
Eads, TN

Background: DRB review is required for this project because it received a 20-year PILOT at the January 12, 2021 CCRFC Board Meeting.

The subject property for the Central Yards project includes 15 parcels near the southwest corner of Central Ave and Cooper Street, spanning a total of 5.54 acres. These parcels are currently occupied by vacant land, as well as vacant or underutilized industrial structures. The planned project will contain four new-construction buildings with a mixture of uses that include 348 residential units, 61,840 square feet of leasable commercial space, and 600 parking spaces.

Project Description: The Central Yards development will include four buildings:

- **Building A:** a five-story precast concrete parking garage, joined to a four-story office structure with a rooftop pool amenity. The building is bounded by York Ave on the north, Tanglewood St on the west, and a new access drive on the south and east. The attached office structure is located at the building's northeast corner. The exterior of the office portion of the building uses brick veneer as the primary siding material, with an aluminum and glass storefront system at the ground floor. Brick veneer is also used on the first two stories of the garage's most visible side facing York Ave. Additional office space is located on the ground floor of the garage facing York Ave, continuing the ground floor activity of the attached office structure along York.

- **Building B:** a six-floor mixed use building with commercial bays on the ground floor and apartments above. The building will be bounded by Central Ave and an elevated railroad line on the north, a new private drive on the east, and York Street on the South. Building B is the largest building in the development, and contains over 20,000 sqft. of retail and restaurant space on the ground floor. Brick and glass are the primary materials on the sides of the building facing York and the private street, with a small proportion of metal siding used as an accent material. These frontages are also lined with the building's retail spaces, which are shaded by metal canopies and feature aluminum and glass storefront systems. The small portion of the building facing Central Ave is also composed primarily of brick and glass, and steps down to three stories to relate to the existing commercial buildings on the street. The remainder of the building's north side, which is screened by an elevated rail line, as well as the west side of the building, uses fiber cement siding as the primary exterior material. Building B also features a central courtyard, as well as a courtyard between the north face of the building and the retaining wall of the rail line.
- **Building C:** a five-floor mixed use building with commercial bays on the ground floor and apartments above. The building will be bounded by Central Ave on the north, a new private street on the west, and a new one-way access road to the south. Similarly to building B, the portion of Building C fronting Central Ave steps down to 3 stories. The building features around 6,000 square feet of ground floor retail with aluminum and glass storefronts facing Central and the new private street. Brick and glass are the primary exterior materials on Building C, with a small proportion of metal siding used as an accent material.
- **Building D:** a five-floor mixed use building with commercial bays on the ground floor, apartments above, and an additional commercial space intended to be a bar at the fifth floor. The building will be bounded by Cooper St on the east, York St on the south, a new private street on the west, and a new one-way access road on the north. The building's frontage on Cooper steps down to three stories, and the building also features a plaza on Cooper that will be partially wrapped by the building's retail space. Brick and glass are the primary exterior materials on every side of the building, paired with metal panels that are used on the upper floors, and as vertical elements that break up the façade.

Staff Report:

Central Yards is a large mixed-use project planned for a key commercial area that has not yet seen a development project of this scale. One of the key challenges for the project's designers was to create a high-density development that would build on the commercial activity in Cooper Young without visually overwhelming the existing buildings. The proposed design addresses that challenge by thoughtfully shifting the scale of the development where it fronts Cooper and Central, and by arranging the buildings to take advantage of existing neighborhood features that provide screening, including the elevated railroad on the north side of the development, and the trees and abandoned rail line on the south.

The development also fully embraces the role of Cooper as a commercial corridor with a far greater proportion of ground floor retail than most new developments in Downtown and Midtown. Active commercial frontage is located at the ground floor of every building in the development. In fact, every building other than the garage devotes its entire ground floor to commercial space, creating over 60,000 square feet of new potential retail.

The active retail frontage within the development is just one of the ways that Central Yards displays urban design best practices. New internal streets are introduced to break the development into multiple blocks. The proposed buildings make use of durable materials, with brick and glass dominating the primary building facades. The development also incorporates open space, including a plaza with frontage on Cooper. Given these characteristics, Central Yards promises to be a strong addition to Memphis's urban core.

Staff Recommendation:

Staff recommends approval, with the condition of additional approvals for lighting, landscaping, and signage.